

80-62 Ex 17 Jan 1962 The threat to US security interests  
in the Caribbean Area

(over the next two decades).

Cuba and any other Caribbean state which fell under Communist control could be used by the USSR as areas in which to establish missile, submarine, or air bases, designed to bring North America under attack or to add to the deterrents to any conceivable US military action in the Caribbean or elsewhere. On the whole, we believe the establishment of such Soviet bases is unlikely for some time to come. Their military and psychological value, in Soviet eyes, would probably not be great enough to override the risks involved.

The Soviet leaders would be concerned lest steps toward the establishment of such bases would provoke the US to overthrow the Castro regime before bases could become operational and would generally heighten the risk of war. Moreover, Soviet bases in Cuba could involve the USSR in difficult political and control problems with the Cuban government; the Soviets have been very careful to retain control over situations which involve them in any serious degree of risk, and they would be mindful of the danger that Cuban initiatives could expose the USSR to serious risks of general war.

((Note U-2 shootdown of 27 Oct!!)) Finally, the Soviet leaders, for the present at least, appear to prefer not to make their presence too obvious or apparent, lest they discourage rather than encourage the spread of communism to other Latin American countries. Since their essential aim in Latin America is not military conquest but Communist revolution, we believe they will prefer to use Cuba as a symbol of spontaneous revolution and as a base for subversive operations.

((No mention of goals in Europe that might seem urgent, might be served by missiles--not just base--in Cuba.))

Nevertheless, the USSR can and probably will augment its naval, air and communications capabilities in the area by the development of arrangements or facilities not openly identifiable as Soviet military bases. ((Fishing port!)) For example, the improvement of Cuban naval and air installations would provide facilities suitable for Soviet use, and special installations and arrangements could be set up for intelligence collection or subversive purposes.

This reluctance to establish military bases might not extend over the entire period under review. ((two decades)) If communism spread to other countries in the area, and if the US appeared to be weakening in world power and national will, the Soviet leaders might be emboldened to buttress their gains by openly establishing Soviet military bases in the area, with the object of further weakening US prestige and further strengthening and protecting their local satraps. If such bases were established, the first step might be the establishment of jointly-operated submarine or air bases, on the theory that the establishment of such bases would be less likely to incur risk of a US reaction than would the establishment of missile bases, while at the same time constituting a demonstration of Soviet presence and protection.



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It is notable that Bloc military deliveries to Cuba to date have been such as to enhance Cuba's capabilities for defense against external attack and for the maintenance of internal security rather than to contribute to the development of an independent offensive military capability. The Bloc has provided no strategic weapon systems. Although the Cuban army has been made formidable by Carib. standards, Cuba lacks the air and naval capabilities required for major overseas military operations, even at Carib. distances. The bomber force is still limited to a few inherited B-26's.

These Bloc military deliveries have been responsive to the most urgent requirements of the Castro regime, but they probably also reflect a deliberate Bloc policy. In keeping with its demonstrated concern to avoid any commitment to come to the defense of Cuba with its own forces, the USSR presumably desires to avoid the possible Sov involvement inherent in providing Cuba with independent means for taking major military action against its neighbors.

On these grounds, we believe it unlikely that the Bloc will provide Cuba with air, missile, or naval capabilities suitable for major independent military operations overseas, or that it will station in Cuba Bloc combat units of any description, at least for the period of this estimate. This attitude would not preclude the liberal provision of Bloc advisers, instructors, and service personnel; the provision of such defensive weapons and equipment as surface-to-air missiles and radars, and such improvement of Cuban naval and air facilities as would enable them to service Soviet units. It would also not preclude the provision of a token number of Il-28 jet light bombers. Special Sov comm and intell. facilities will probably be established in Cuba.

((So: from past behavior, Sov intentions and motives are deduced, and from these, future behavior predicted; the bet is against change in behavior. (But what precludes change in motives, goal?)

Note early origin of offensive-defensive distinction, precise lines drawn in Sept 13 statement (except for Il-28s); prediction of everything except: a) SU combat units, large personnel base; b) large number of Il-28s; c) MRBM-IRBMs.

(Had estimate changed at all as of 1 Aug? 19 Sept? Were any "surprises" noted at all by then?)

If the overthrow of the regime should be seriously threatened by either external or internal forces, the USSR would almost certainly not intervene directly with its own forces. However, interpreting even an internal threat as US intervention, the USSR would seek to deter the US by vigorous political action, including threats of retaliation on the periphery of the Bloc as well as ambiguous references to Soviet nuclear power. Nevertheless, the USSR would almost certainly never intend to hazard its own safety for the sake of Cuba.

((Is there a hint of following methodology: 1) Deduce past SU goals from past action; 2) extrapolate future actions on assumption that goals are constant?))